

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A1

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Wider Contra Links Of Bush Aides Aired

Vice President 'Not Informed' of Contacts

By David Hoffman
Washington Post Staff Writer

Two top assistants to Vice President Bush had more extensive contacts than previously acknowledged with a key figure in the effort to resupply the Nicaraguan rebels at a time when Congress had terminated military aid to them, according to a chronology of the contacts made public yesterday by Bush.

In a statement released by his spokesman, Bush was described as "not informed" of the contacts concerning the resupply mission. The spokesman, Marlin Fitzwater, said later that Bush was "disappointed that he was not informed" of these meetings but stands by his earlier statement that his aides were not directing or coordinating the resupply efforts.

Bush also reiterated yesterday that he never talked about the Nicaraguan rebels with Felix Rodriguez, who was the chief link between the resupply operation and the Salvadoran air force. Bush has said he met Rodriguez three times, but knew nothing about Rodriguez's connection to the resupply operation. The chronology does not explain how meetings between Bush's top national security advisers and Rodriguez—some of which were held in the vice president's office complex—would not have come to Bush's attention.

Bush's office released the chronology yesterday in an effort to answer questions about the involvement of his aides in helping the Nicaraguan rebels, also called contras, at a time when Congress had terminated military aid. However, last night, Fitzwater disclosed that the chronology omitted a visit by a Bush aide to two contra military camps in Honduras last Jan. 19-21.

The chronology shows that the same aide, Army Col. Sam Watson, Bush's deputy national security adviser, was informed by Rodriguez Oct. 5 when a C123K cargo plane involved in the resupply effort was

missing over Nicaragua, and Watson then informed the White House Situation Room.

Watson was called twice about the missing plane, on Oct. 5 and 6, by Rodriguez, a CIA and Bay of Pigs veteran. It was subsequently learned that the plane had crashed; the one American who survived, Eugene Hasenfus, is serving a 30-year sentence in Nicaragua for his acknowledged role in the resupply operation.

Hasenfus identified Rodriguez as one of two coordinators of the resupply effort. However, documents subsequently obtained by The Washington Post indicate that Rodriguez was not formally a part of the operation, but served as the chief link with the Salvadoran air force.

The chronology also shows that Bush's national security adviser, Donald P. Gregg, held two meetings last August—instead of the one meeting he previously acknowledged—to talk about financial problems with the resupply effort.

The first meeting was in Gregg's Washington office on Aug. 8 with Rodriguez. The second session, Gregg disclosed yesterday, was after Rodriguez had left Washington but was designed to pass Rodriguez's concerns along to senior officials from the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency and the White House.

Gregg yesterday reiterated the claim that these meetings were the first time the Bush advisers discussed the contra operations with Rodriguez, although the chronology shows that they had many earlier contacts with him as well as meetings as recently as Nov. 12. Rodriguez had been referred by Gregg to Salvadoran military leaders as a counterinsurgency expert with training in pinpoint "lightning" raids against guerrillas by helicopter.

The chronology also discloses for the first time that Watson met with Rodriguez in El Salvador Jan. 19-21 "to discuss counterinsurgency operations." The chronology said "this was part of an orientation trip to the area" for Watson. Among those he met was the chief U.S. military adviser in El Salvador, Army Col. James Steele, who kept in regular contact with the resupply operation.

At the time Watson made the trip, the resupply operation was in its formative stages; Watson visited Ilopango, a Salvadoran military base where the operation was centered.

In response to a query, Fitzwater said last night that on the same trip, Watson visited two contra camps in Honduras: Yamales, an instruction base, and Aquacete, an air base. Fitzwater said the information was omitted from the chronology because it did not pertain to Rodriguez.

Bush's account and records obtained separately suggest there may have been contact about the downed C123K cargo plane between Bush's staff and associates of retired Air Force major general Richard V. Secord who were managing the resupply network from here.

In a previously disclosed message dated Oct. 6, Robert C. Dutton, a Secord associate supervising the operation from Washington, complained to operatives in El Salvador that Rodriguez was passing inaccurate information about the plane "directly to high-ranking officials." The reference apparently was to Watson, who, according to Bush's chronology, received calls from Rodriguez about the missing plane on Oct. 5 and 6.

Staff writers Joe Pichirallo and Charles R. Babcock contributed to this report.